



The Strange Case of MARY PAGE

The Great McClure Mystery Story. Written by
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HER FATHER'S DEATH

SYNOPSIS.

Mary Page, actress, is accused of the murder of James Pollock and is defended by her lover, Philip Langdon. Pollock was intoxicated—drunk, a crook and tool of Pollock, was on the fire escape watching for Langdon. At Mary's trial she testifies that Mary threatened Pollock with it previously, and Mary's leading man implicates Langdon. Mary's escape after the murder is a mystery. Brandon tells of a strange hand print on Mary's shoulder. Further evidence shows that horror of drink produces temporary insanity in Mary. The defense is "repressed psychosis."

PSYCHOLOGISTS and those scientists who study the human brain declare that the focus of consciousness is dual, and that unless the sub-conscious mind supplements the conscious concentration, the attention is easily diverted. Thus it was that Mary Page, sitting in the



Langdon and Mary Page.

prisoner's dock with the Damoclean sword of justice above her, was now unconscious of the crowd in the courtroom.

Mind and soul were alike concentrated upon Langdon and upon the slow building of the evidence that was to free her from the charge of having murdered James Pollock.

A tumult of old memories was surging about her, as witness after witness told of the tragedy of a year before; (a tragedy that had so grim a sequel in the present,) and yet there were strange nightmarish blanks in those memories—spaces where fact had to give place to imagination, and during which she had hung in the nullity of uncounted moments, merging like a person under ether to momentary pain-seared consciousness, only to sink whirling back into oblivion. And it was of these moments of which Mary herself knew only by hearsay that the witnesses were now testifying.

Mary did not realize the subtlety with which Langdon was calling these witnesses. In fact, it was doubtful if any of those in the courtroom except perhaps the Prosecutor and the Judge, appreciated the skill with which he brought out each detail in its turn.

In pursuance of his method of bringing out events as they had happened he had already, at a "bar side conference," asked permission to recall his witnesses a second or even a third time. Thus it came as a surprise only to the spectators when Mrs. Page again took her place in the witness-box.

"Mrs. Page, you told us yesterday of how your daughter, struggling with her drunken father, was struck by him and fled screaming from the house. Will you tell the court, please, what followed that flight? Did you go after her or remain at home?"

"It was impossible for me to follow as quickly as Mr. Langdon did," she said quietly, glancing toward the Judge. "So I stood at the gate waiting, feeling sure that it would only be a very few minutes before he would return with my poor, half-crazed girl."

"I went back as far as the window. It was very cold and I wanted to get a wrap, but I—I was afraid of my husband. I saw him sitting by the table still drinking. At last, however, he fell over onto the couch asleep, and I went in and got wraps and blankets, thinking to start out myself in search of Mary. As I came out of the cottage I saw Mr. Pollock drive up in his motor. He said, 'My God, she'll die out there in the cold. They must be a pack of idiots not to have found her in

this time.' Then he grabbed the other man by the arm and said, 'Get in the car and show me how to reach the place where the searching party is. I'll find Mary—I promise you that.'"

"Did he offer to take you with him?"

"Yes, but I felt that I must stay at home in case—in case they brought her back, or she wandered back of her own accord."

"Did you go into the house after they had left?" Langdon's voice was very gentle now, and Mrs. Page smiled at him, a smile that was far sadder than tears as she said:

"No—I wrapped myself up and sat on the steps. I—I felt nearer to Mary out under the stars."

"That is all, Mrs. Page."

But now the District Attorney was on his feet holding up an arresting hand.

"Mrs. Page," he said harshly, one lean finger thrust towards her menacingly, "if your husband struck your daughter and injured her so terribly that she temporarily lost her reason, why doesn't she carry a scar?"

"Why, she does." There was a note of surprise in the quick answer, and Mary's fingers tightened ever so little about the rail in front of her.

"Is it possible to show the court that scar?" There was a sneer in the voice; a sneer born of the realization that something must be done to stem the great tide of sympathy for Mary, and cast disparagement upon this story from the past. But his request was a boomerang, for when Mary, trembling a little, took her place before the court and, lifting the soft hair from her forehead, showed the great livid mark of a hideous scar, the murmuring of compassion that swept through the room found a mute echo on the Bench itself, and the Prosecutor, discomfited, swung curtly away and dropped into his seat as Langdon called the next witness.

"John Alexander MacPherson."

"Mr. MacPherson, you have told of seeing Miss Page running through the wood and of my finding her. Will you tell us now, please, whether you saw me again on that night and under what circumstances?"

"I saw Mr. Langdon again on that night within the hour. I had no more than reached home and were telling my guide wife of the evening when there came a knock at the door. I opened it, and there stood Mr. Langdon. He was all in a feery farry—not to say commotion, and his face were white. Beyond him I cude see two or three other men—all excited like."

"Did you recognize them?"

"Aye, there were men from the town—I had seen them often, and taken a wee drapple wile them at the hotel come Saturday night. But it were Mr. Langdon who spoke. 'Have you seen Miss Page,' he cried, catching at my sleeve. 'We are looking for her.' 'Did you mean tae say you've lost her again?' I asked; and he said, 'Yes, I sat down to rest a bit and I must have lost consciousness. When I came to, she was gone.'"

"Did you go with any of the three men?"

"Havers, no, man! I came back for my cap and coat, and I got to the door



"I—I felt nearer to Mary out under the stars."

just in time tae save Mr. Langdon from a bad fall, for he would hae gaen over in a heap if I hadn't caught him. My guide wife and I took him in the house, and when he were revived a bit I was for leavin' him, but he wouldn't stay. He said, 'I must find Mary myself—it was I lost her the second time.' So we went out together."

"How long was it before you got a trace of her?" Langdon's voice was toneless, but his eyes were alight with fire as he pictured to himself that strange night hunt for the slender girl he loved. The occasional shouts of the other searchers; the dash of a lan-

"Dr. Angus Foster!"

Only the fear of the dire threat of the Judge to "clear the room if there was any disturbance" held the spectators silent at the sound of that name, for Dr. Foster had played his role in many another court-room, while his fame was a byword all over the world. Kings of Wall Street owed their grip upon affairs to his care when mental breakdowns seemed inevitable.

He was not a tall man, but the dignity of his carriage, and the way he held his shoulders, lent him an appearance of great height as he took his place in the witness-box and held up his right hand to take the oath.

"Dr. Foster, you specialize in diseases of the brain, do you not?"

"I do. In both mental and nervous ills."

"Have you a sanatorium just outside this city?"

"I have."

"Have you ever seen the defendant before?"

"I have seen Miss Page on several occasions. The first time was when I saw Mr. Langdon, whom I had known for some years, drive up with a girl beside him in the motor. She seemed to be asleep or only partially conscious. She opened her eyes as I came up, and got unsteadily to her feet, and then I noticed that her heavy veil hid the fact that her face was livid from some great suffering. After we had given her into the charge of Nurse Walton I took Mr. Langdon into my office, where he told me briefly of Miss Page's attack of madness, and the incidents that had led up to it. While Mr. Langdon was still talking I saw an automobile drive furiously up to my gate and a man leap out. My exclamation drew Langdon to the window and he cried sharply, 'My God! that's James Pollock!'"

"Did you already know who he was?"

"Yes, I had heard of him from various men who had been my patients, and Mr. Langdon had already told me that Mr. Pollock was engaged to Miss Page, and also something of how that engagement had been brought about."

"Was Mr. Pollock brought to your office?"

"No. I went out into the hall to meet him and took him into the general reception-room. I told him Miss Page's condition necessitated absolute rest for at least twenty-four hours. He became insulting and abusive and accused me of keeping Miss Page a prisoner, so I decided the best thing to do was to let the young lady herself decide whether or not she wanted to see him."

"Did you go at once to Miss Page?"

"No, I left Mr. Pollock in the reception-room and returned to my office, where I apprised Mr. Langdon of the situation. Together we went to the room assigned to Miss Page. She was in bed, and seemed comfortable and calm. While I was talking to her, however, finding out a little of her nervous condition, Mr. Langdon, who had been sitting near the door, gave a sharp exclamation and darted out into the hall. Miss Walton, the nurse went to the door after him, but before she reached it we could all hear the sounds of a loud altercation. When I reached the scene myself, I found Mr. Langdon barring the way and Mr. Pollock attempting to force himself past to get to Miss Page's room. He declared it to be his right to be with her and said that Mr. Langdon was an interloper, a kidnapper, and a great many other things."

"Did you interfere?"

"I did. It took me some time to quiet Mr. Pollock, but he returned to the reception-room eventually, and Mr. Langdon and I hurried back to Miss Page who was very much excited and was crying out that she did not want to see 'James'—or anyone except her mother and Mr. Langdon. She quieted down when we came in, especially after she had been reassured that no one would disturb her."

"Did you give any orders to that effect?"

"I did. I told Miss Walton to sit where she could watch the door, and that if James Pollock made any attempt to come down the hall she was at once to ring for help and bar him out."

"Did Miss Walton seem to consider the order unusual?"

"Well, not exactly that. She seemed agitated and upset by the name, but evaded my question as to whether she knew him. However, as I had always found her trustworthy and a splendid nurse, I paid but little attention to her excitement."

"You say you paid but little attention to her excitement. Did you have any inkling as to what might have caused that agitation?"

"Not at the time, but later when Miss Walton told me what had happened, admitting—"

"May it please the court," interrupted the Prosecutor, leaping to his feet.

"Dr. Foster is retelling hearsay, and I object to the question of my learned colleague." There was a tinge of satisfaction in his voice at being able to

My friend Dr. Jamison and his wife will give her temporary shelter and the proper medical attention."

"Did Mr. Pollock acquiesce?" Langdon's voice was dry with reminiscences.

"Mr. Pollock was sair angry, and he said, 'It is not for you to say what my future wife shall do. I'll not have her put with your friends. She shall go home with me—I can protect her from her father. I suppose you think you can carry her right off under my nose. Well, let me tell you that's called by an ugly name!' At that Mr. Langdon shouts, 'What do you mean, Jim Pollock? Tell me what you mean by that!' He lookit so fierce I feared a fight, so I went between them and said, 'Dinna fash yerseels like that! Think of the puir lassie—and be quiet.' Then I says to Mr. Pollock, 'Ye'll gang outside a bit and when the lassie is restit, I'll let ye know.'"

"Did Mr. Pollock go then?"

"Aye, for I went w' him to the door myself."

"Were the men still outside?"

"Na, and it gi' me a shock like, for I cude see na one except the friends of Mr. Pollock. The lthers had all slippit awa' towards the town."

"Did you speak of their absence when you re-entered the cabin?"

"Na, for I had ither matters to make clear. I had made up ma mind that it



"I can protect her from her father."

was na with Mr. Pollock that the lassie should go, so I pit it tae Mr. Langdon, that w' my horse in the sleigh, we cude carry the lassie out the door to the kitchen and drive off, leavin' the guide wife to tell the lthers."

"Did you carry this plan out?"

"Aye. We fillit the sleigh with blankets, and I pit my shot-gun in the front and we helpit the lassie out—"

"Will you tell us please, 'what you expected to do with a shot-gun?' And a little twinkle sparkled for an instant in MacPherson's eyes."

"Mr. Pollock was in an automobile," he said, "and shot is a grand thing for fires. Nae doot you can guess yourself how much chance they have to escape it."

A ripple of laughter swept through the room, instantly hushed at the warning frown of the Judge, and MacPherson, his huge brown hands gripped about the edge of the stand, turned inquiringly towards Langdon.

"Will you tell us, Mr. MacPherson, as briefly as possible, what occurred while you were on your way to the residence of Dr. Jamison?"

"We had na mair than got startit when the noise of the horse brought one of Pollock's friends to the corner of the house to look oop the back road. At sight of us he gave a cry and ran back, shoutin' to Mr. Pollock. . . . We had a fair getaway, but na horse is as gude as one of those devil machines, and they were after us at once. So I tookit the reins and give them to Mr. Langdon and said, 'You drive, and pit the lassie down. I've a way of stoppin' them as is bein', but I need my hands.' At that I tookit my gun and stude up in the sleigh. I cude see the lthers plainly, and I shoutit, 'Go back, unless ye want to be hurtit!' But they only swore at me, and when I saw they were gainin' I sent a load of shot towards them. It did na harm, but they stoppit short, tae see if there was hurt. 'They'll na oom after us again the night,' I said; but it was na mair than a few minutes before Mr. Langdon said, 'I hear the motor!' And I said, 'There's another barrel to the gun.'"

It was a strange scene that he drew for them in his deep, quiet voice—a scene so unreal that it was incredible to most of those present that it could all have happened not so very many miles from the court-room where they now sat—a scene with the dark, snowy road and the silent woods for its setting, with the flying sleigh speeding almost noiseless over the slippery road. Langdon, his face white and set with fatigue and anxiety holding the ringing reins in one hand while the other arm held close the half-conscious form of Mary, her bandaged head ghastly above the enveloping blankets; while over them towered the grim figure of the great Scotchman, his shot-gun to his shoulder, his big body swaying with the speed of the flying sleigh.

"I waited till they came oop too close," he finished, a deep note throbbing in his voice, "and then I did for a fire w' the second shot. 'The auto nigh upset w' the force of the explosion, and they all jumpit out. And that was the last we saw of them.'"

"Did you remain at Dr. Jamison's house when you reached there?"

"Na. For when I had seen the puir lassie taken away by the kind gude wife of the doctor, and I knew she were safe, I kepit thinkin' of how fast the men had gone from the house that night, and I says to Mr. Langdon,

'I will fer' take a run back to the town, I'm thinkin', and make sure there's na harm comin' to Dan Page through this night's work.' And Mr. Langdon says, quick like, 'What do you mean?' So I told him and the doctor, and Mr. Langdon was all for comin' w' me, but the doctor wouldn't let him. 'Dinna fash yerseel,' I said, when I saw the doctor was right. 'I'll gae fast, and if there is need for you I'll come right back.' And the doctor said, 'You're all worn out, Philip. You've got to have some rest. Be sensible.' So I went back alone."

"At what hour did you reach the home of Miss Page?"

"I dinna ken the exact hour, but it were about daylight, and I cude see quite a ways ahead of me."

"Will you tell us, please, what you saw when you approached the Page house?"

Slowly one great hand clinched itself into a knotted fist, and the muscles of his jaw tightened, and across those who sat between, the gray eyes of the Scotchman and the tear-dimmed eyes of Mrs. Page met in a mute communion of terrible memories. Then, slowly, with a new tone of suppressed excitement lending a thrill to his voice he said:

"When I got nie enough to see the house, I cude see a great black splotch in front of it, that I made out to be men. Then I cude hear shouts: 'Come oot, Dan Page, we've summat to say to you!' So I didna drive right oop to the place. I stoppit in the road and crept through the wood at the back and, hiding under the hedge, got oop to the rear. Then I wrote on a wee scrap of paper, 'I've news of Mary—and I come to bring help.' Then I tappit on a window, till I saw Mrs. Page peerin' oot—and I held up the paper."

"After a minute or so she unlatched the back door and I slippit in. 'Oh, Mr. MacPherson,' says the puir lady, cryin', 'is my girl safe?' And I says, 'Safe and sound asleep.' And she says, 'Thank God.' Then I heard another voice sayin', 'Annie, Annie—who is it? Don't let them get me—oh, my God, don't let them get me!' And I saw that Dan Page was hidin' behind her, clingin' to her skirts like a scared bairn. His face were all drawn and twistit like, and his mouth was slobberin', and he kept cryin', 'I was drunk—I was drunk! You tell them, Annie—You tell them!' At that she says like one speakin' to a child, 'There, there, Dan—you're safe!' And then there came an awfu' cry from outside: 'Come oot, Dan Page—or we'll smoke ye oot like the beast that ye are!' At that Mrs. Page began to sob and says, 'Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do? They will na talk to me—and they'll burn oor hoose, they'll burn oor hoose! Oh, if Philip were only here!'"

"Dinna greet," I said, 'I'll get him, but he mun ha' time. Let Dan Page go upstairs and talk to them from a window.'"

"Oh, Dan," says the puir lady, 'Dan—will you do that? Tell them you didn't mean to hurt Mary—or me.' 'No, no,' he whimpered, 'I can't, I can't!' But I grabbit him by the arm and pulled him to his feet. 'Be a man,' I cried, and I shookit him. 'Be a man and get you upstairs!'"

"You'd be safe in the cupola, Dan," says Mrs. Page. 'I'll stay with you—and this kind man will go for Philip.' But he kept sayin', 'No, no,' and I could hear the others bangin' at the door and I dared not stay, so I slippit oot the way I came and went off for Mr. Langdon."

Mrs. Page, whose anxiety to be near Mary had kept her from returning to the witness room, shuddered at the memories that MacPherson was conjuring up out of the past. The softness which time has lent the tragedy of that chill winter morning was stripped off, exposing the old horrible wound, and she could feel again those groping fingers, icy cold, clutching at her as she strove to drag Dan Page up stairs towards the cupola.

She could hear his voice, now thick with drink, now athrill with terrible fear—as he pleaded with her to hide him and to save him. She had been mercifully numb with the horror of it then; consumed only with the desire to hold those men at bay long enough for MacPherson to bring help, and it was that desire which gave her the strength to drag the heavy bulk of her husband up the two flights of stairs into the little cupola at the top.

She could feel again the sting of the cold down wind against her face as she stepped out on the platform of rough boards and dropped the inert figure of her husband at her feet.

Then with all the eloquence of her great fear she had pleaded with the mob below to go away. They had seemed all eyes floating on a great pool of blackness against the snow as she looked down, but later she could see the grim mouths below the eyes and knew that her pleas were falling on deaf ears.

Finally one who seemed to be the ringleader had stepped forward and cried:

"Where is your husband? It is he that we want to talk to." And she had lied and said, "He is sleeping."

They muttered ominously at that and again the ringleader spoke: "We have no quarrel with you, Mrs. Page, but no drunkenard who strikes his daughter and drives her insane shall stay in this town—Dan Page has got to go."

"He will, he will," she promised wildly. "I'll take him away today. He didn't mean to hurt us—he didn't know what he was doing—But he'll go away—oh, I promise that." And again the grim voice answered her:

"He'll go, but WE'LL see him off. Let him stand up like a man and talk to us."

At that they all took up the shout for Page, and he, lying on his face on the boards, moaned and prayed to the

God he had long forgotten, to save him.

How long she talked and urged and wept and pleaded Mrs. Page herself did not remember, but somehow she had held them—still threatening—still ominous—till far down the road she saw a small speck that she knew was an approaching sleigh with two figures in it.

At sight of it she had forgotten everything except an infinite relief, and crying in her joy had sped down stairs, leaving Dan Page still huddled in the windy cupola.

If she hadn't—she shuddered, and caught her breath in a smothered sob, and for a moment the court-room hung in a haze before her and the voice of MacPherson speaking on the witness-stand receded to a vast distance and seemed to be again the murmuring voices of that angry mob. But she fought back the impending faintness and the rising tears, and as one bracing himself against the impact of some great weight, she straightened her slender shoulders to meet without flinching the story of that morning's tragedy.

"When Mr. Langdon and I drove oop," MacPherson was saying, "the men were still there, and Mr. Langdon stood oop in the sleigh and made a speech to them urging them to go home quietly. 'Miss Page is safe in the hands of a good doctor,' he said, 'and you will only make a bad matter worse if you attempt to carry out this plan of whipping Dan Page out of town. I'll see to it that he leaves the community, but if you drive him out this way, it's going to mean disgrace to the town and to Mary Page, too. Do you suppose she could bear the thought of her father's having been publicly whipped?' 'Well,' shouted one of the men, 'tis no beatin' her the way he has done it—Drivin' her and—the brute!' And the crowd began to murmur again. Then Mr. Langdon told them that the drink was like a ragin' beast inside Mr. Page, that he knew nought of what he did; that he probably didn't remember anything—that he really loved his wife and his girl. And while he was talkin' one of the men gave a cry and pointit oop, and there in the cupola stood Dan Page—widin' like the daft, clingin' to the rail, and he cried out, 'What he says is God's truth. I love my wife and girl as much as you men love yours— It's whiskey that hurt them—not me. I've been a slave in the grip of a fiend all my life. I've tried—my God, men, I've tried—to keep away from it—but it gets me. The sight of it—the smell of it—the taste of it—is ever in my mind. I drink because I must, and drink more to drown the memory of it! I've lived in hell for years, and no horsewhipping could punish me—as does the knowledge of this night's work.' Then suddenly he burst out cryin'—sobbin' like a child, while the men stood starin' oop at him. Then he flung out his arm and said, 'Philip—take care of them—be careful of Pollock—I'm going to take myself out of the community—now!' And at that he leapt oop onto the rail and jumped."

MacPherson broke off abruptly, and his hand shook as he wiped the drops of sweat off his forehead—and the shudder that gripped him swept through the entire room at the thought of that body hurtling through the air down upon the snow to stain it with that swiftly flowing stream of crimson.



"Was Mr. Page killed instantly?"

Only Mrs. Page sat erect and unmoved, but her eyes were pools of an agony too deep for expression.

"Was Mr. Page killed instantly?"

"Yes, he was dead when we pickit him oop, and the men spread their coats over him and carried him to the hoose."

"Did you go into the house with them?"

"No," said MacPherson, "as well ye know, sir, I tookit you back to the doctor's hoose."

Langdon smiled a little. "It's not what I know, but what I want you to tell the court, Mr. MacPherson; so will you please tell them, as succinctly as possible, what occurred upon your return to the residence of Dr. Jamison?"

"It were the gude wife of the doctor that met us, and toldit us that the doctor had Miss Page in his laboratory making some tests about the brain."

"The doctor had already said that he had been making some special tests for the brain," Langdon's voice rasped sharply through the room. "Did he make the results of those tests known to your presence?"

"He said, 'She is sane now, and these tests will relieve her, but I would advise you to have Dr. Foster, the alienist, make an examination. She has still much to suffer, and—this thing will come back!— You'll have to take good care of her and guard her, Philip.'"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]